Interview with Michael Weyl

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Information Series

MICHAEL WEYL

Interviewed by: Hans N. Tuch

Initial interview date: June 26, 1988

Q: This is Hans Tuch and I'm interviewing Michael Weyl today, June 16, 1988, here in my home in Washington, D.C. This is Tape One, Side One. Thank you Mike for joining me in this conversation. By way of introduction I might just mention that Michael Weyl was born in Switzerland and received his primary education in Zurich. He then received his secondary education in Gottingen in Germany. He had his university education at Princeton University, receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1937. He then went on to pursue his academic studies at the University of Wisconsin where he received his M.A. and his Ph.D., primarily in German literature but also in Scandinavian literature, art history and American literature.

Origins of Public Diplomacy

One of the things that we want to explore in this conversation is the origin and the early days of what we now call public diplomacy. And you happen to be one of its earliest practitioners. It's been my own personal theory, so to speak, that our present conduct of public diplomacy has its origin in two really separate sources.

One of them was the Cold War when it was decided during the Truman Administration that the U.S. government had to do a bigger and better job than it had done before in projecting its society, its objectives, its goals to the world in contrast and in opposition to what was happening in the communist world. That's one source.

The other one, surprisingly as far as I'm concerned when I got into this, the other origin of public diplomacy seems to me to be our activities in the occupation of Germany and Japan after World War II where for the first time we became interested in the realm of re-educating and reorienting the populations of those defeated nations towards democracy, where we got into programs with a long- range purpose of education, of exchanges of people, of libraries, of publications, of books. We really got involved in very serious and long term programs of cultural communication. So those two threads.

We are interested this afternoon primarily in exploring our activities, our cultural and information activities in Germany, in which you were very substantively involved almost from the beginning. And so my first question, Mike, is how did you get involved in all of this?

WEYL: Before I answer that let me just say I never got my Ph.D. at Madison. I did all the prelims. But just in a way this will lead us into how I did get into public affairs work. Because the war prevented me from getting my Ph.D. I mean, someone who has basically a German background could not sit still during the beginning of World War II. And hence I had to get, in one form or another, into the war. I first worked in Washington. Then I was in the Army.

Weyl Entry into Public Affairs Work: 1945

How did I get into this? Well, I came to Germany with the troops early in the Spring of '45 and was trained as an interrogator of prisoners of war.

Q: Camp Ritchie.

WEYL: At Camp Ritchie, yes, yes. You too?

Q: Absolutely.

WEYL: Exactly. But since there were no longer hardly any prisoners of war I interviewed Werewolves. But then I got into the de-Nazification work. And I was in charge of the interrogation team at one of the large internment enclosures near Stuttgart. Now, this was work that simply didn't sit well with me. So I tried to get out of it, and succeeded; I got into the Information Control Division of military government.

First, simply to get a job in it, I acted as theater control officer in one part of Baden-Wurttemberg.

Begins As Acting Head of Libraries in Baden-Wurttemberg

But a few months later the lady in charge of what we then still called the American libraries in Baden-Wurttemberg, had an accident in London. Both her legs were broken by a taxi. So I had to take over what were then still called the American libraries in that land.

Q: Right. One of the three occupation areas of the U.S. Government.

WEYL: Plus Berlin.

At that time we had five of these libraries in Baden-Wurttemberg. When I quit this work two years later we had six and we had opened about 14 branch libraries in Kreis resident towns.

Q: What was the purpose of these libraries? The Army obviously established these libraries in these cities. Why?

WEYL: These were to begin with only libraries. And their purpose was simply to inform the German population about American civilization, American culture, science, across the board. To begin with almost all our books, I would say even all our books were English language books and some magazines.

We were starting in late '46. We were very poorly staffed. We were poorly equipped. My main concern as I took over these libraries was to get coal for them to heat up our rooms. The winter '46-47 was an absolutely miserable winter.

Objectives Shift From De-Nazification to Re-Orientation and Re-Education: 1947

But then, beginning in the fall of '47 suddenly the pendulum swung in military government policy and it swung from the emphasis on de-Nazification, to an emphasis, as you mentioned, on reorientation, re-education.

Now, Tom, these terms never sat well with me. But whatever we did under these terms I found absolutely first rate, very worthwhile and very much needed. So our libraries suddenly became America Houses, major American cultural centers. In Stuttgart we moved. In the other cities we enlarged. We suddenly got a lot of books. There was a team of people back in Washington who selected books for us. And then we started with exhibits. We started with lectures, with discussions, the whole gamut of programs while it still basically ran under the heading of re-education and reorientation. It basically was what it used to say on the USIA Building for years. It was “to tell America's story” with the special emphasis of what made this American society run and what was relevant in this society for the state of development Germany was in. So we certainly stressed democratic procedures, a lot of emphasis on education, on child education and things like that.

Q: Now, parallel with the operation of these libraries with lectures and book collections, discussion groups, were there other cultural programs that were being conducted by our

people who were interested in education and in information? Obviously the press was revived through a system of licensing.

WEYL: Not only that but we ran our own newspaper, the Neue Zeitung. We ran our newspaper which was a first rate paper. We ran our own periodicals. And there definitely the cultural input was considerable.

Q: The Neue Zeitung was the newspaper if I remember published in Munich, Berlin, and Frankfurt.

WEYL: Frankfurt, yes.

Q: And the periodical was Der Mouat?

WEYL: Der Mouat came later. The American Review, a monthly. And I would say the radio. After all when I was in Stuttgart we controlled radio Stuttgart.

Inauguration of Monthly “People Ask, Officials Answer” Programs in Kreis Capitals

Q: Did you personally have something to do with this?

WEYL: No, not personally. However, I should say this brings me to one activity that turned out to be very important. I didn't invent it. But I ran it. Namely a series of monthly programs which we took to “Kreis” capitals or county capitals which ran under the title “The People Ask, Officials Answer.” We combined a team of American military government officials with German officials, partly from the land government in Stuttgart and partly from the Kreis government. The Kreis governor (Landrat), for example, was usually on the panel. And people could ask questions. It was run on the basis of a very popular U.S. radio program at that time, town meeting of the air. The panel was made up of Americans and Germans. The Americans, some of them at least, needed an interpreter. So we took an interpreter along. And this became very popular. I recall towards the end usually the military governor of our land came along, a very fine man, one of the La Folette family, a

former Congressman from Iowa. These town meetings were always broadcast over Radio Stuttgart.

Q: German radio?

WEYL: Over the German radio. Because it was all basically in German though some of the American contributions to it were in English and then translated by a very capable somewhat aggressive interpreter. This way a lot of false rumors could be removed. And also simply a technique could be introduced representative of an open society.

Q: In other words we were involved. You mentioned newspapers, periodicals, radio broadcasts, libraries.

WEYL: Very important.

Q: Library activities which were for the first time American activities in another country which did not have anything directly to do with our conduct of our official relationship.

WEYL: It was a new element. But it was important. Two elements I should mention. One is that we began to put a lot of German language books on our shelves.

Q: Translations.

WEYL: Or by German exiled writers that had been published outside of Germany during the Nazi period. And since I was in Stuttgart, several times I went either with a convoy of trucks to Switzerland or went to Switzerland and brought back railroad cars full of German language books that had been printed largely in Switzerland and in Sweden by known German authors. So, for example, Kafka was utterly unknown in German at that time. But this was important.

Q: Let me interject a personal note. You were born in Switzerland as a Swiss citizen?

WEYL: No, never was a Swiss citizen. My parents were German.

Q: Oh, German. So you grew up in Germany.

WEYL: No, I grew up mainly in Switzerland. My roots are in Switzerland.

Q: Secondary education in Germany.

WEYL: Three years in Gottingen.

Q: Then you came to the United States.

WEYL: To Princeton, yes.

Q: You became an American citizen.

WEYL: Oh, yes.

Q: You came back to Germany.

WEYL: In uniform.

Q: In uniform. Most of the people who were involved with you in this program—

WEYL: My American colleagues.

Q: Your American colleagues. Most of them were still servicemen or—

WEYL: We were all in uniform.

Q: All in uniform.

WEYL: And if we civilianized, as I did in early '48, we still wore a civilian uniform. We could not wear civies. But, of course, I still had my military rank when I started this work.

Q: This was 1945 after the end of the war which in Europe ended in May. And then it went on. You were talking now about 1945, 1946, 1947.

WEYL: Yeah, I slid into this in the summer of '46 into this work. Because I did de-Nazification bit for a bit more than a year.

Q: Now, your colleagues were American ex-service people or still service people. I would assume officers and enlisted men.

WEYL: Both, yes.

Q: Who had some kind of training background, inclination for this type of work?

WEYL: No doubt about it. Now, my predecessor was an American of Norwegian descent, a lady who ran the library. She was a trained librarian. Incidentally, you said the two roots and I think basically you're right. The Cold War and military governments in Japan and Germany, Austria with its emphasis on re-education. But there was also already before the war and certainly during the war we had our relationship with Latin America and had a cultural program there, the Rockefeller Program.

And during the War, we had the Office of War Information which was important. Actually the first people in our sort of work in Germany came out of the Office of War Information. My predecessor had worked for OWI and was still in OWI when she started this work in Stuttgart in the summer of '45 and then was absorbed by Military Government. Now the name comes to me, the Information Control Division of Military Government took over this function that had already been in the hands of the OWI. The OWI had an office, I recall, in April '45 in Bad Hamburg. I visited them in Bad Homburg. I was in Mainz just across the river. I visited them in Bad Homburg. It was still OWI, Office of War Information.

Q: Well, our former colleague Lee Brady got into OWI in France. It was not an occupied country, a liberated country. And I should have mentioned, at the same time while we were

engaged in our occupation of these former totalitarian countries, we were also getting involved in the liberated countries, especially in Europe.

WEYL: I think we had to learn to behave like a world power.

Q: Yes.

WEYL: And it needed an informational and cultural dimension. So that grew in a way out of OWI; we had doubtlessly a library right away in Paris and Rome, etcetera and in London.

Q: In Lyon also.

WEYL: In Lyon even, yes.

Q: Okay. Were these libraries already known as America House (Amerika Hauser)?

Birth of Amerika Hauser

WEYL: No. That was we had a meeting. And we all submitted to a big discussion. And out of that, this is now in the summer I think, spring or summer of '45.

Q: '45?

WEYL: '47, excuse me. '47. And decided to give our operation the name America House rather than American cultural center or something. But it came with the sudden emphasis on this part of the occupation policy. The American Kreis Resident Officers, the ones I still knew when I came to Germany in '45 and '46, were truly administrators. But now they became re-educators.

Q: Absolutely.

Byrnes' Speech Announces U.S. Change in Public Diplomacy Emphasis, Through Shift Begun Earlier

WEYL: And that is true. Now, I was there at the speech in Stuttgart in September '46 which was really the announcement of the Cold War in a way. It was putting down the gauntlet that we had a problem with the Soviets that had grown out of the common, out of the allied control council. And that also meant that we became much more—we, the U.S. military government became much more interested in democratization, in reorientation, in creating a positive alliance already then with the German people.

Q: Well, that speech it seems to me was really the change in American direction.

WEYL: It was the announced change. We had felt it before. I must say I sat in there and said, Mr. Secretary of State, you're not telling me anything new. And I thought this was interesting. Because we had felt it in our bones. There was a real change in policy.

Q: From treating Germany as a defeated occupied—

WEYL: Enemy.

Q: Enemy.

WEYL: Yes.

Q: Into a potential—

WEYL: Ally.

Q: Ally.

WEYL: Friend.

Q: Friend.

WEYL: Yes. And a further step, but that came later, was the Berlin Airlift. That created a real sense of friendship that spilled over from Berlin into the western parts.

Q: That did not come until 1948.

WEYL: '48, '49, yes.

Q: But let me go back. You then had the America Hauser, the America Houses. You headed them in Wurttemberg-Baden.

WEYL: Yes.

Q: There were you said five.

WEYL: We started with five. I ended with six. We opened a sixth one in Heilbronn. Also, I ended with 14 branch libraries. We opened branch libraries in Schwabisch Gmund and Schwabisch Hall and in Aalen, etcetera, etcetera.

Q: I want to identify the five or six.

WEYL: Oh, boy.

Q: Stuttgart.

WEYL: Heidelberg.

Q: Heidelberg.

WEYL: Mannheim.

Q: Mannheim.

WEYL: Karlsruhe.

Q: Karlsruhe.

WEYL: And Ulm.

Q: Ulm and then you added Heilbronn.

WEYL: Heilbronn.

Q: Heilbronn, right. Now, you obviously had some kind of interaction or supervision from at that time I think it was Bad Nauheim or—

WEYL: Berlin. It was Berlin.

Q: Berlin?

WEYL: It was Berlin.

Q: Because there were similar programs, similar institutions in the other Laender [states].

WEYL: And we had meetings.

Q: You had meetings and coordination.

WEYL: I remember we had a lovely meeting in Berchtesgaden. And afterwards we all went up to that vacation place up in the mountain where we played poker for a whole weekend, yes.

Q: Now, this was before Mrs. Patricia Van Delden became the head of all the America Hauser.

WEYL: Yes. Before her was someone called Cecil Hedrick. And he's the one who settled with us on the term America House. And she succeeded him. Because Pat Van Delden then was in some respects my boss. And I had, of course, also the boss in Stuttgart.

Q: Public Affairs Officer.

WEYL: Well, he was the Commanding Officer for the Information Control Division, Military Government, Stuttgart, or rather Baden-Wurttemberg, yes. A colonel who did not speak a word of German but a gentleman, yes, and a man of good will. The amazing thing is how much I was on my own in those days. There was very little directive. Pat began to take the reigns into her hand and took a much keener interest in the content of the program. Up to that time we were largely on our own. Then one guy began to appear in our life, I read now about him. That was Peter Harndon. He did the exhibits. And now I read about him as the husband of Missy in the Berlin Diary.

Q: He later went to France.

WEYL: He went to France and worked for what then became ERP—the European Recovery Program. And then he went on his own. He was in Berlin with military government. And he came to Stuttgart with a fairly big exhibit on TVA that was hard to place in our house in Stuttgart.

Q: Were there some other people that you might just want to remember or mention that were involved in this work with you and made a contribution?

WEYL: Well, whom did I see? I saw Fred Taylor who was with Radio Stuttgart and continued to play a role in USIS.

Q: He then went on to be director of RIAS.

WEYL: That I didn't know. Because last seen he was running the America House in Cologne.

Q: Well, that was the last. But in 1950—

WEYL: I hadn't realized that, yes.

Q: Because he was Gordon Ewing's boss.

WEYL: I didn't realize.

Q: Gordon Ewing was the Deputy Head of RIAS in those days.

WEYL: I see. I hadn't realized that. But he was heading Radio Stuttgart.

Q: Oh, yes.

WEYL: So I knew him. John Boxer.

Q: Yes.

WEYL: Who then established an office in Zurich and represented a lot of American pocket book publishers; you see the American pocket books all over Europe.

Q: Yes.

WEYL: But I can't recall anyone who really became a major figure in our operation in Stuttgart.

Q: Now, if I remember correctly you were in Stuttgart until about 1950.

WEYL: No, I left in '48.

Q: '48.

Good Reception Germans Gave to Libraries

WEYL: Yes. For two reasons. One is I felt I had enough of occupied Germany. It was a very difficult and trying life. It was terribly ambivalent. It was fascinating. And we played a

real role in opening doors for people who were interested to know what had happened and what was happening in the world. Because you must realize, at that time Germans were still absolutely isolated within their country. They could not travel. So it was important what we did then, what we brought in for anyone who wanted really to know. You dealt with the most interesting people. And you had close personal contacts with these people.

Q: Now, you said you had very little supervision.

WEYL: Relatively little, relatively little until Pat Van Delden came along.

Q: Right. But that was '48.

WEYL: I think that's right.

But One of Weyl's Lectures Met With Antipathy

Q: So in these two years before that time in that period of real creativity or dynamics where you started these libraries and these various programs, where did you get your resources? In other words, where did you get your books, your speakers, your exhibits?

WEYL: Well, when we were still American libraries, I happened to be one of the first Americans who lectured to German audiences. It sometimes worked well. But I sometimes stepped right into it and had a terrible time. And they attacked me, and so on.

Q: Oh, really?

WEYL: Yeah. Well, I still remember one lecture that was built up very much. And I talked about how an American feels about post-war Germany, trying to stress the positive but also leaving in some critical things. But then all the questions came from refugees who'd come in. The German speakers who'd come from Romania, from Poland, etcetera who wanted to go back to their homeland and said, why don't you get us back and make our part of Europe part of Free Germany. And there I stood and was utterly unprepared for this

sort of question. And also knew that it was a lost cause. And I tried then to tell them, look. Forget about it. You've got to try to settle here in what is now Western Germany. Don't ever think that you can go back to Romania or to the Volga or to Silesia.

Q: So these were really political programs that you had.

WEYL: They were not. I attacked it from the psychological, cultural point of view. But I don't think they even listened to that. They had come to find out whether they could go back to the Volga.

Q: Interesting.

Sources of Books for Libraries; 1946-48

WEYL: But then I had other meetings very early I think already in the fall of '46, I talked to Germans. Well, then when I took over the American libraries our resources were relatively—were the books that we got out of Army libraries. You scrounged them in a way. The OWI had made some available. But you know the Army for the GIs had published excellent books in a pocket book format, excellent titles. And that was mainly what we had. And we got a few periodicals. It wasn't much. But then one day appeared a guy on an airplane who came out of the civil affairs division of the Department of the Army by the name of Tom Simpson. You may even remember him.

Q: I remember Tom Simpson.

WEYL: Tom Simpson.

Q: I knew him very well.

WEYL: And he now was an emissary from this division I didn't even know existed to tell us that they were selecting books and to find out what we needed. Tom and his staff, a few people actually in Washington. You know, I succeeded Tom in late '48 here in the States.

Q: I didn't know that.

WEYL: Tom selected books for us. And suddenly there appeared by the APO mail a great big list of titles. And presently these titles appeared. And Tom had written a ringing declaration, forward to this list of books, how we wanted to present untrammeled freedom. And these books were first a very good job of what Tom and his staff had selected. And these books arrived. In addition we got funds to supplement it with German language books. And, of course, circulation of the German language books was usually ten times as frequent as the English language books. That was in the nature of the beast. After all this is '46 to '47 let's say, '48, early '48. And there weren't all that many Germans whose English was really good enough to read a book in English. So the German language books were what really sold, as it were. And we also got suddenly periodicals. We got about 100 subscriptions to periodicals. Then as far as lectures is concerned—America House.

German Librarians Fight American Library System of Open Shelves

Q: One interjection before we get to the lectures. The principle of having open shelf libraries.

WEYL: That was very important. Yes, that's the second point I want to make. Ours were open-shelf libraries. And I, of course, was dealing with librarians here in the southern part of Germany who fought—also public librarians fought the open-shelf. The Wurttemberg-Baden library system at that time still had a system if you took out one novel you had to take out one non-fiction book. And sometimes an 18 year old took out a novel or asked for a novel and the librarian would say this I cannot let you read. So it was a highly controlled, closed-shelf library system. And they fought the open-shelf library system. But they have now come around to it. But it took many, many years.

Q: Yes, I remember working in Frankfurt where I was the America House Director.

WEYL: In which years?

Q: Starting in 1949. One of my principle contacts was Professor Eppelsheimer.

WEYL: Oh, yes. Famous name, yes.

Q: Who was the librarian of the University of Frankfurt. And he became so convinced that the open shelf system was an important element in a democratic society that he built the first open shelf library for the University of Frankfurt.

WEYL: For the University! Because even today universities as a rule do not have open shelf libraries in Germany. There had been a few open shelf libraries before Hitler in Bremen and Hamburg. But in South Germany the libraries were truly closed libraries. And the librarian controlled the reading of her public.

So ours was a very important contribution. I'd sit in meetings, attended librarian meetings. And it was a tough battle to defend it. You lose all your books they say. They'll disappear. They'll be stolen. And we can't control the reading of our public, we must educate our public.

Lectures and Exhibitions

Q: Now, we were getting into lectures and exhibitions.

WEYL: Well, to begin with when we were still an America library, small, it was simply you picked up whom you could. For example, there was in Stuttgart Bernie Taper who then became quite well known, was on the staff of the New Yorker. He represented the Fine Arts Division of Military Government. And Bernie Taper has written some books. He's written one about Balanchine. He's written a book about Casals. And was on the staff of the New Yorker. Bernie Taper had a real interest in Kafka. I simply said, Bernie, let's have a seminar on Kafka. And there were these German intellectuals who knew about Kafka,

had never read Kafka but wanted to find out. So this was an incredibly interesting thing. We had no—here's another well-known person.

Newell Jenkins who was music control officer in London and Baden Wurttemberg later became the Director of the Clarion Concerts in New York. So he has a name. There are a lot of recordings that Newell Jenkins had made. Newell and I organized “the Friends and Foes of Modern Music.” And we got musicians from the Stuttgart Orchestra to perform contemporary music. More American than non-American, and would meet maybe four or five times a year for music lovers. A difficult piece they might play two times that evening. But this was simply a local initiative.

I knew from, I don't know from where, I knew the editor of what had been during the occupation a Danish underground paper Borge Outze. And somehow, I think together with Frankfurt, we invited him to come from Copenhagen to Germany in late '46 to lecture about the resistance in Denmark. His German was quite good. It had to be because he had some tough scrapes with the Gestapo in Denmark and he simply got out of it by talking good German, posing as a German. So very courageous, an amusing man, pretty sharp—we simply invited him. It was our initiative. Berlin didn't even know about it. I don't think even Colonel Hill, my boss knew about it. We simply invited Borge Outze. He was, of course, interested to come to Germany.

Q: I must say for a young—in this case you were still a Department of the Army employee. But for a young officer involved in this it was a very exciting time.

WEYL: It was an exciting time. But at the same time it got to me and it got to Margareta very much, my wife. Because after all this was an utterly destroyed and still in many respects utterly demoralized country. And it was tough to operate, to live in this country. Because we spoke German, we had a lot of Germans come to our house. So we were involved in the post-war German scene. Margareta worked in the bunkers in Stuttgart where they had the refugee families. And it was tough on her. It was tough on me.

After 3 Years, Mike Weyl Returns to U.S.

So we decided after three years we've had it. At the same time my mother was dying. And the two things combined—we came back in early September '48. But then I got Tom Simpson's job here.

Q: I must say I have not thought about him for many, many years.

WEYL: A pioneer.

Q: He was one of the pioneers in this. And he actually was instrumental—I worked for him also when I came back from Germany in 1955.

WEYL: By then he'd moved to 1778 [Pennsylvania Avenue].

Q: Well, actually we were in the Walker Johnson Building.

WEYL: That's right.

Q: Which was then on the corner of 18th and New York Avenue.

WEYL: Yes, yes. I know that office too.

Q: Okay. So let us—is there anything else that you might like to mention about those particular years in Germany, in Stuttgart where you were involved in starting our cultural affairs program?

The Children's Library Introduced by Weyl

WEYL: One thing that I didn't mention that was quite important. We had a children's reading room with children's hours which later became anathema in USIS.

Q: Finger painting.

WEYL: Yes, but also children's books. Reading. There are lots of photographs of this. And this was also of real interest. After all, the press was on our side and covered our activities. And then we had the theater group in our house. Then my successor came in. That was too much for him. So he abolished it. So my sort of cultural assistant was fired.

Q: Who was your assistant?

WEYL: Her name is Ulla Dulberg. I still see her now and then. Ulla Dulberg became ultimately the editor of the Readers Digest Books in Germany. So he kicked her upstairs, a mighty kick.

Q: I had in Frankfurt in my job there as the America House Director I had a children's library but also children theater which became quite well known in Frankfurt.

WEYL: These things were pioneer things. Simply the fact that a library had these things in them and paid attention to kids and took kids seriously was something very important.

I wanted to say too and I think this was in 1947-48, too. Running the America House, I always had very close contacts with the education division of Military Government. We tried to educate the Germans to persuade to adopt American or democratic educational practices and introduce educational reforms. But we did not want to foist it upon them. Well, ultimately out of that grew our own educational information centers that were separate from the America Hauser. But during the time I was in Stuttgart, the America House served also as an education reference library. And I worked very closely together with the education people. There was a whole staff in the education division of Military Government. After all we paid a lot of attention to that. And there was close cooperation between these two elements of Military Government.

Q: Okay. Let us close the chapter for a second on the beginnings of U.S. cultural and information activities, at least in Germany. I'm going to interrupt and change the tape.

This is a continuation of the interview with Michael Weyl, Side Two of Tape One, recorded on June 16, 1988. Mike, you started to say something just as we shut off the last tape.

Interesting That the Cultural and Political Reorientation of the U.S. Information Program in Germany Was Result in Part of U.S. Recognition That Soviet Aggressiveness Required Democratization of Germany as Counter-balance

WEYL: One thing that I should have stressed mainly is that late in fall of '46 when I took over the American libraries in that land, I was the only American in charge of these five libraries. Then as the pendulum swung and re-education, reorientation became really the major preoccupation of military government, we got staff. So Americans were selected and appointed to run these American libraries that then became America Houses. We got more staff. We got many more resources. So there was a very, very major shift in policy.

And it is my feeling that this would not have been possible if not the two strands that you mentioned at the beginning came together, namely the realization that we were in a confrontational situation vis-a-vis the Soviets who were clearly engaged in trying an expansionist policy. And we had this responsibility toward the occupied nations and our former enemies who. we now realized, had to be made into friends and allies. And this brought the two strands together and brought lots of resources to the work that was focused on reorientation. And that's why, for example, the Military Government would go on these excursions to a county capital and participate in these panel discussions with seven, eight hundred Germans that were then broadcast all over the land. Simply the emphasis and the interest was now on the work that was very much neglected in the first year and a half of military government.

Q: This is very interesting to me because I have never thought of it that way. I thought that the emphasis that we put into this education or re-education in Germany was purely directed toward bringing the German population back into a sort of democratic mold of

nations. So the real impetus that we put all these resources into this, as you just state, was motivated by our opposition to the Soviets—in part at least.

WEYL: I think it was a dual task. And they complemented each other and in a way augmented each other. After all we felt as a nation awfully good after the war. And there was a strong missionary impulse behind us as individuals, behind our work. And, of course, the Germans accepted this. They psychologically were in a terrible situation, had a God-awful inferiority complex vis-a-vis us Americans. And I should say this is also one of the reasons why I ultimately felt I must leave this Germany. I couldn't stand being a missionary and feeling so goddamned superior to the Germans at the same time, not always being in love with them. It was often a very strained situation in which you found yourself. Many of them were in difficult psychological straits. And you felt this. And they exploited you.

Q: How about the young people, the people who were in high school, in gymnasium, or were trying to get back to some kind of university education? Was there contact with them?

Youth Was Not a Target Group in Early Public Diplomacy Days

WEYL: I'm afraid not, no. One would lecture now and then to university students. But I'm afraid one just came in and lectured and had a few, very, incidentally very polite questions. And that was it. But if I think of our lives, the contacts we had were with professionals at the middle level and the higher level usually in their forties.

Q: In other words you were dealing with say possibly high school principals.

WEYL: Very much. Teachers.

Q: Educational officials of the land.

WEYL: Newspaper people, mayors, government officials, librarians.

Q: That was the priority.

WEYL: Journalists. Lots of contacts with journalists. Publishers, editors of periodicals. So if I think of the real friends we had that's what I'm describing.

Q: I think one thing that one might just mention in this connection, parallel to these activities went also our efforts to re-establish a democratic press in Germany.

WEYL: Yes.

Q: By licensing publishers and editors to start.

WEYL: Of that I have no direct knowledge. But we had this interrogation center or screening center in Oberinsel which did in-depth interviews with potential candidates for these leading positions. I must say from simply observing what happened in those years in Germany this was one of the major triumphs of Military Government. Out of it came a first rate media infrastructure with very good people in charge of it. Both radio, newspapers, periodicals, films, book publishing was really remarkable what came out of the ashes.

Weyl Opposes Any Separation of Cultural and Information Work in American Public Diplomacy Programs

Q: We can just change gears for a minute, change direction. Another subject that I think is of interest, certainly is of interest to me. You spent most of your career abroad as a cultural affairs officer, cultural counselor. Some of it as a public affairs officer in our bureaucratic realm where you have a USIS establishment with the PAO and an information officer and a cultural affairs officer.

There is at the moment considerable controversy about the role of our cultural activities. There has been over the years the point of view expressed by Senator Fulbright who felt

that our academic exchange program should be pristine and separate from any, I would say, any propaganda work if you put it that way.

WEYL: Yes.

Q: Quite crassly. And therefore, he insisted that it remain in the State Department until 1978. And then it became part of USIA. But even now there are many people and certainly some of our former colleagues in the cultural affairs field who have never felt comfortable to have cultural affairs part of the overall public diplomacy establishment.

WEYL: Yes. The idea of the British counsel for example. Actually, I see a lot here of the French, what the French are doing in Washington. And their cultural work is apolitical because they have cultural and linguistic mission. No, I think it wouldn't sit well with America to separate culture with a capital C from the rest of the public diplomacy. Because I think in this American society, what we call culture is such an integral part of society and also of the political structure that I think in our government operation abroad it should be one club as it were, one organization. And certainly I've always felt the cultural affairs officer and information officer should work, and under the best of circumstances do work closely together. They complement each other in a very significant way. Because we've gone through this.

There have been many searching inquiries into the work. I recall attending a meeting in Vienna in '75. I think the Stanton Committee looked into this at that time. And these questions were raised. There's an awful lot to be done in a USIS post. Of course, obviously the cultural office to begin with clearly is responsible for a clearly defined set of activities, of programs. Those are his bailiwick. But in terms of their content, of what you're trying to communicate via exchange of persons, via seminar programs, via library programs, support to book publishing, that is very closely integrated with the total American society. And with what the information officer and to some extent the public

affairs officer tried to communicate to the host nation. And you shouldn't separate the two. Because as you work together you simply improve the quality and the intensity of the work.

Q: This happens to be you also.

WEYL: Yes.

Q: I hope I didn't ask this as a leading question. But because there are even today people who write, Dick Arndt.

WEYL: Yes, I correspond with him.

Q: Who feels differently about this, who does believe that cultural exchanges, cultural activities should be really an end in themselves rather than—and I don't think I misquote him, part of a U.S. public diplomacy program. He has written extensively about his belief that the way cultural affairs is conducted by USIA, also by its personnel is not the optimum way.

WEYL: This brings up one thing that for example we've discussed a lot with Jock Shirley. Namely to what extent should a USIA officer—cultural, information, PAO—be an interlocutor? And I don't know where we stand in the year 1988 on this issue. But certainly when I had a lot to do with Jock in the early '80s he was very strong on this, that you as a PAO, I as a CAO, should also be a very articulate and well informed representative of American society. My feeling is: Fine up to a point. But I'm not a renaissance man. I cannot really speak with real authority let's say on nuclear science, on space research, on contemporary poetry, on neo-realistic art, on problems of higher education. So I always felt up to a point I can try to be familiar with whatever interests me particularly, for example, when I was CAO in Germany.

We decided almost by committee—Mike Weyl as an interlocutor focus on American education. So I read a lot. And when I was back on home leave I really tried to get first-

hand information that it wasn't all simply knowledge acquired through reading. But it stops at a point. So I always felt that my major job should be to bring German, Swedish, Indian audiences in contact with truly well informed articulate representatives of aspects of American civilization and also people who represent quality and who are impressive as human beings. I've always put quality above content. It doesn't matter so much what they are specialists in as long as they just impress an audience as human beings.

Weyl's View of Cultural Affairs Work in Public Diplomacy; His Philosophy of Carrying Out USIS Programs as an Open Dialogue

Q: And from your point of view if you analyze it what was the purpose of your specific cultural work? I mean, what is the long term or the short term, what is the purpose of our cultural activities?

WEYL: I drifted away from this idea of telling America's story abroad and simply providing telling insights into American society. I really embraced in a way the Reinhardt period, namely the dialogue. The real exchange of information between two or several cultures. I think in terms of making America respected this gets closer to that goal than if the host audience feels we are there to tell them: Look, how terrific we are! That if we engage in a genuine dialogue which hopefully is really genuinely connected with mutual interests and mutual respect, we gain as a nation at the end of the 20th century.

Q: That, of course, brings in the learning experience as much as the so to speak teaching experience. They go hand in hand.

WEYL: The dialogue.

Q: The dialogue, yes.

WEYL: Well, we called ourselves the International Communication Agency. And it should be, I feel very strongly, a two-way street, learning from each other; also this makes a real

impression on the host nation when the American comes there and wants to find out and wants to gain new insights, gain perspectives on himself as the other person wants to gain perspective on himself through the exchange of views with the American.

Now, I talked very much in terms of personal meetings because the libraries are important. They are fine, but it's a monologue. It's not a dialogue. You take a book out of an American library. And that book is a monologue. You can't discuss with it.

Q: Well, on the other hand when we talk for instance about exhibitions, our exhibition program in the Soviet Union is predicated on the fact that our young guides who are there to explain things about a particular exhibit get into a dialogue with the people who attend the exhibit and therefore that is the important element in my view of our exhibition program. Because it too promotes a dialogue.

WEYL: Well, of course, the exhibit is again a monologue. But then it depends on the quality that it represents which I think is of the utmost importance and also that the exhibit doesn't come in there and say, look, aren't we terrific. But sort of that the exhibit takes a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. And if it deals with controversial issues, it should really give the feeling that not everything is hunky-dory in the United States. We have serious problems and here they are. We try to clearly articulate them and also say obviously something about dealing with them. And we are concerned. But also, that they are real strong forces focused on these problems.

Q: One thing that has always interested me in our work, and I'd like to have your views on this, I have always felt as you just expressed that we ought to show our society as it really is—warts along with the good things. In my discussions with some of my colleagues and certainly my ambassador in the Soviet Union at the time when we were discussing for instance the content of our magazine America where I also felt that we should not just show the beautiful things about our society. But we should explain and try to discuss in that magazine our problems.

WEYL: Yes, exactly.

Q: What the issues are that concern us.

WEYL: Yes.

Q: He, the Ambassador, and others have felt that you really have to be—you can't do that he said. Because in a closed society where you have no experience of self criticism where the government would never criticize itself especially in its projection of itself abroad, that if you admit to certain problems and admit to mistakes that you had made in your own society, the reader, not having this experience that we have of an open society, will think it must be much worse than it really is. Because you, the government, tried to show your own failures and your own faults.

WEYL: I see. Well, I've never obviously worked in the Soviet Union. My inclination would be to hell with that. I would rather think people who buy America in the Soviet Union are pretty smart individuals. And they are much smarter than the regime thinks. Well, I've just come back, you know, from the GDR. And I've come back with a very strong impression. It is pathetic how paternalistically that government in the German Democratic Republic treats the people. The people are much smarter than the government, and this is one of their main dissatisfactions with it, that they're treated like little children. Look at the media. And I would rather think also in the Soviet Union people read America who are after all fairly intellectually advanced and interested and open. They would rather respect us for being so open about our society. Because if we do what their media do toward them you have already lost them.

Q: This particular argument can go even further. You also worked in the Voice of America as a Policy Officer. And there the problem actually goes one step further, that it is very difficult to have the Voice of America also talk about our country, our society, as it really is.

Because the listener who gets apparently objective news and information about America doesn't separate the Voice of America from the U.S. government.

WEYL: Yes.

Q: The BBC is not regarded as the government.

WEYL: I feel the Voice of America would—I don't know who really listens to the Voice of America regularly. But I would think people who make the effort to listen to the Voice of America would judge it ultimately by its basic stance, not by what it says minute to minute. But the way it—the attitude it represents of a responsible organ. Fine. That's financed by the government. But after all, it represents a very open society. And if that is not a very open medium then you've lost the audience. You don't gain their respect. Obviously there's always then the other side, which will say right away the moment you even mention some of the really questionable aspects of this society it's a self flagellation, a mea culpa type. I think if you represent a truly responsible open society that is proud of itself, proud of its achievement, very much aware of the problems. And some of them have got awful problems that it must deal with. But also will communicate that there are a lot of forces that are in a very responsible and sometimes truly effective way dealing with these problems. If you don't communicate this, you've lost your audience. It's just another propaganda outfit. Pay very little attention to it. They may still listen to it for the news. But otherwise, they will not be interested. So this was sort of my sermon on the mount at VOA: It is the basic stance that counts that we take as the Voice of America and don't ever play around with the news. And don't try to make everything come out like we are just as close to perfection as any society has ever come.

Q: Thank you very. This has been very useful I think for others, for researchers and for people who want to know what we're all about. Thank you.

WEYL: Okay.

End of interview